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Writing tips and helpful hints for teachers and students

We hope these suggestions will help you foster students' efforts to use their thoughts and feelings about selected artworks as inspiration for creative writing.

Poetry writing suggestions

Before your tour, consider the elements of poems...

- Select several poems to read together in class. Have students note the length of lines and breaks, use of punctuation, and use of descriptive phrases, fragmentation, and incomplete thoughts.
- Point out that rhyme is not always used in poems. Ask students if they can find other examples of rhythm besides rhyme. How does the poem sound when it is read? How should/could one read the poem? Quickly? Slowly? Loudly? Quietly?
- Ask students to consider how poems are descriptive. Is the poet able to form a picture in the mind of the reader? Do certain words relate to each other, and if so, how? Look for use of alliteration, personification, metaphor, and imagery. Ask students to analyze and describe how these elements may have enhanced the piece.
- Have students use a journal to take notes.

Haikus

Choose a few haiku examples to read together in class. Note that haikus, while short, are powerful in capturing a moment in time with an original, often potent description or combination of words.

- Write out the pattern for a haiku:
Five syllables for the first line
Seven syllables for the second line
Five syllables for the third line
- Next, introduce a subject, such as a season, and have the students come up with a list of descriptive words.
- Have students write haikus with a partner or individually and then read them aloud.
- Ask students to pay special attention to the pace at which they read their haikus.



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Acrostics

- Write a few related words, like rain, tree, grass, sun, bird, vertically on the board.
- Choose one of the words and have students provide a descriptive phrase for each letter.
 - R = Racing to the soft ground
 - A = Aimless, wandering and thundering
 - I = Interrupting my quiet thoughts
 - N = Never stopping, like a hammer
- Next, have students choose one of the other words from the list and work on an acrostic in their journals.

Prose writing suggestions

Before your tour, consider the elements of prose...

- Prose is the ordinary form of spoken or written language, without metrical structure.
- Narrative prose generally tells a story and often describes actions, intentions, outcomes, and personal experiences.
- Read together or give students several examples of short prose. Ask them to look for structure and any obvious characters, settings, themes and then evaluate the quality of the piece.
- Have students list a few ideas for themes that interest them and consider how to form their ideas into stories that include a beginning, middle, and end.
 - Beginning:** might capture the attention of the reader with an exciting scene, interesting piece of dialogue, or an indication of the overriding theme.
 - Middle:** might move quickly, building anticipation or suspense that makes you want to know what will happen.
 - Ending:** might make clear that a significant experience has been had or something has been learned.

Descriptive writing suggestions

Before your tour, consider the elements of descriptions...

- Descriptive writing offers a distinct portrayal of a person, place, or thing, and gives the reader a more vivid experience.
- General characteristics of descriptive writing include:



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Elaborate use of sensory language;
Rich, vivid, and lively detail;
Figurative language such as simile, hyperbole, metaphor,
symbolism, and personification;
Showing, rather than telling through the use of active verbs
and precise modifiers.

Source: <http://www.thewritingsite.org/resources/genre/descriptive.asp>

- Go to our website <http://www.virginia.edu> for examples of artwork, or use an image you already have.
- Have students brainstorm a list of ‘fact’ words based on the image you are using:
Who? What? Why? Where? When?
- Next, have students brainstorm a list of descriptive ‘sense’ words about the image.
- Ask students to consider the following questions:
What do the colors make you think of or feel?
What sounds do you think you would hear if you were in the scene?
What would you feel if you were in the scene?
If you could touch something in the piece, how would it feel?
What might you smell or taste if you were in the scene?
- Have students work on recognizing and creating similes and metaphors by using the following beginnings, or some similar to these; encourage them to avoid clichés.
The grass was soft, like...
Her face was as red as...
Gentle as...
The buildings in the city are tall men...
- Ask students to consider how words can be used to paint a picture. How can they convey emotional intensity?

Revisions

After your tour, consider revisions to the written piece...

- Remind students that revision is a necessity; once something is written it almost always needs to be edited and improved upon.
- Ask students to look over their work and consider the following questions:
Is there anything else the reader needs to know?
Are the words and information in the most logical or



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effective order?

Are there extraneous words or bits of information that should be removed, added, or replaced for greater fluidity, clarity, or expression?

- Try writing an ordinary bland sentence on the board and have students come up with better, more specific adjectives and stronger, more original verbs. Have them rewrite the sentence in their journals and then take one of their own sentences and do the same with it.
- Students might trade papers or work in teams to proofread and suggest where improvements could be made.
- Remind students that their piece must relate in some way to the artwork they selected, but the art should serve only as an inspiration for creating a story or poem. They should not ‘retell’ the story of the artwork.
- Teachers and/or parents may also edit for grammar and spelling and give suggestions for improvement before a final copy is done.
- Final copies need to be typed. Prose should be double-spaced and poetry should be single-spaced with double-spaces between stanzas. Please have students use 12 point Times New Roman. Text should be flush left for prose and also for poetry unless there is specific intention for presenting it otherwise. There should be no identifying marks like school, class, teacher, or author’s personal name or initials.